

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4370

S E C R E T NEW DELHI 3149

NODIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IN, US

SUBJECT: INDO-US RELATIONS: WOULD A PRESIDENTIAL LETTER BE
HELPFUL?

1. I THINK THAT WE MIGHT GET SOME GOOD AND DO NO
DAMAGE IF WE MAKE ONE FINAL EFFORT TO COMMUNICATE
WITH MRS. GANDHI ABOUT THE SORRY STATE OF OUR RELATIONS.
I RAISED THE PROBLEM WITH HER BRIEFLY AT OKR BICENTENNIAL
RECEPTION FEBRUARY 27 AND SHE ONLY SMILED. YET SHE
DID COME AND HAS REFRAINED FROM CRITICIZING US SINCE THEN.

2. YOU MAY WISH TO CONSIDER THE ONE THING WE HAVE
LEFT IN OUR ARSENAL: A DIRECT LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT
TO MRS. GANDHI SETTING FORTH SOME OF THE POINTS YOU
AND I HAVE TRIED WITH HER AND HER FOREIGN MINISTER.
I CERTAINLY DO NOT PROPOSE ANY CHANGE IN OUR POSITION,
ALTHOUGH IT WOULD HAVE TO BE SET FORTH CAREFULLY IN
A LETTER SO AS NOT TO NEEDLESSLY IRRITATE ITS READER.

3. I HAVE URGED A TOUGH LINE WITH THE INDIANS.
YOU HAVE MY RECOMMENDATIONS ON PL480. YET I DO NOT
THINK OUR INTERESTS HERE ARE NIL.

4. MRS. GANDHI MAY BE GOING OFF TO SEE THE RUSSIANS
LATE THIS MONTH AND IT MAY NOT HURT TO GIVE HER ONE
MORE INDICATION THAT WE ARE GENIUNELY CONCERNED ABOUT
THE STATE OF OUR RELATIONS BEFORE SHE GOEF. THE INDIAN

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BUREAUCRACY, I AM CONVINCED, WOULD LIKE TO SAVE OUR RE-

LATIONSHIP. SO WOULD A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF POLITICIANS. IN FACT, P. N. DHAR ASKED US THE OTHER NIGHT IF ANYONE ON OUR SIDE WAS TRYING. MRS. GANDHI'S OWN MOTIVATIONS CONTINUE TO LEAVE ME PUZZLED. PERHAPS SHE IS TRYING TO TELL THE SOVIETS THAT SHE IS NOT MOVING TOO CLOSE TO US WHILE SHE AND HER SON CONTINUE DOWN A TRACK WHICH IS INCREASINGLY DISTASTEFUL TO HER OWN LOCAL COMMUNISTS AND LEFTISTS. MAYBE AS MANY OF US SUSPECT, SHE IS JUST DAMN SUSPICIOUS OF THE US.

5. THE PURPOSE OF A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT WOULD BE TO RESTATE THAT WE HOPE FOR AN IMPROVEMENT, NOT A DETERIORATION, OF OUR RELATIONS WITH INDIA, BUT THAT THIS CANNOT TAKE PLACE IN A PUBLIC ATMOSPHERE OF SUSPICION. I WOULD THINK A LETTER MIGHT SAY THE FOLLOWING THINGS:

A. WE SEE GENUINE BENEFIT FOR BOTH SIDES IN AN IMPROVED BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP AND IN OUR COOPERATION IN MULTILATERAL FORUMS.

B. WE SUPPORT STABILITY AND PEACE AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN THE SUBCONTINENT AND APPRECIATE INDIA'S PREEMINENT ROLE IN ACHIEVING THIS.

C. WE HAVE BOTH HAD DOMESTIC PROBLEMS IN RECENT YEARS WHICH HAVE STRAINED OUR INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL STRUCTURES. BUTH THESE ARE INTERNAL MATTERS AND SHOULDN'T AFFECT OUR RELATIONS. THE US PRESS IS OFTEN ACERBIC ON PROBLEMS IN BOTH INDIA AND THE US BUT THEIR VIEWS ARE USUALLY NOT THOSE OF THE GOVERNMENT.

D. MUTUAL CONFIDENCE AND TRUST IS NECESSARY FOR THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF AN INDO-AMERICAN RELATIONSHIP TO PROSPER. MISTRUST AND SUSPICION WILL STAND IN THE WAY OF MUTUAL BENEFIT.

E. THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT IS NOT INTERFERING AND DOES NOT INTEND TO INTERFERE IN THE SECRET

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INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF INDIA.

5. I DON'T KNOW WHETHER THIS WOULD HAVE ANY AFFECT ON MRS. GANDHI, BUT IT WOULD CERTAINLY PROVIDE A RECORD WHICH WE MAY FIND HELPFUL IN THE FUTURE THAT WE HAD MADE THE STRONGEST POSSIBLE EFFORT ON OUR SIDE TO KEEP THE RELATIONSHIP GOING. I MUST, HOWEVER, POINT OUT THREE POTENTIAL PITFALLS: FIRST, IF THE PM CONTINUES

HER SNIPING AT US AFTER SUCH A LETTER, WE ARE LEFT WITH LITTLE TO FALL BACK ON DIPLOMATICALLY AND WE SHOULD PLAN ON DIMMING THE LIGHTS ON OUR BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP TO A "PARKING" LEVEL. SECOND, IF MRS. GANDHI DOES RESPOND TO A PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE BY CUTTING DOWN OR OUT ON HER PUBLIC CRITICISMS, THE BENEFITS WILL IN ANY EVENT BE LOST OR SEVERELY JEOPARDIZED SHOULD WE GO AHEAD WITH ADVANCED WEAPONS SYSTEM SALES TO PAKISTAN. IT IS SIMPLY A FACT OF LIFE HERE THAT THE INDIANS WOULD VIEW THIS AS AN INDICATION OF US HOSTILITY. IF THIS IS ON THE RELATIVELY NEAR-TERM HORIZON, IT WOULD BE BETTER NOT TO AROUSE EXPECTATIONS OF IMPROVING RELATIONS FROM A PRESIDENTIAL LETTER ONLY TO DROP THEM SHORTLY AFTER. THIRD, THE TIMING OF A LETTER SHOULD BE KEYED TO A CALL I WOULD PLAN TO MAKE ON MRS. GANDHI BEFORE I LEAVE TO RETURN TO THE US ON MARCH 11, AND BEFORE THERE IS A PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT OF A VISIT BY MRS. GANDHI TO MOSCOW. THE TYPE OF LETTER I ENVISAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT SHOULD BE CONVEYED TO THE PRIME MINISTER IN PERSON AS A PRELUDE TO MY CONSULTATIONS IN THE DEPARTMENT. SHE WOULD HAVE TIME TO REPLY BEFORE I REACHED WASHINGTON AT THE END OF MARCH. A LETTER WHICH FOLLOWED A PUBLIC REVELATION OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S IMPENDING TRAVEL TO THE SOVIET UNION WOULD TAKE ON THE APPEARANCE OF A US APPEAL IN THE CONTEXT OF THAT TRIP, AND OF US-SOVIET RELATIONS.

7. THERE MAY BE OTHER CONSIDERATIONS WHICH WILL APPEAR OVERRIDING FROM YOUR VANTAGE POINT, BUT I WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR GIVING CONSIDERATION TO THE SUGGESTION.
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